

Maintaining Duxbury's nature trails

BY STEVE DONOVAN

You would think trail maintenance would be relatively simple. When compared to actually making trails – laying them out to take advantage of terrain, views, tree and plant species, making sure they are on Conservation property, cutting brush, briars, vines and downed trees, building bridges over streams and laying foot walks over wet areas - trail maintenance should be a breeze. Trails are built and maintained by Duxbury's Conservation Commission, which fine tunes the process to have the least negative impact on Mother Nature while affording safe and pleasant walks. The Duxbury Conservation crew plus many volunteers succeed with flying colors. That fact is burnished brightly by complimentary notes and phone messages from residents and others who walk, jog, cross country ski, snowshoe and bike the many beautiful trails in Duxbury. Sometimes people – being human – can make trail maintenance more difficult. Trails mostly do a decent job maintaining themselves by not growing too many things where people often walk. However winds blow, wet snow stresses tree trunks, carpenter ants get hungry and occasionally gravity takes over. Trees fall and conservation workers, volunteers and sometimes DPW tree climbers head out to clear them. That's normal maintenance, pesky sometimes, occasionally a bit dangerous, but expected. When people make the problems however, trail maintenance can be troublesome.



Conservation **Conversation**

Some folks with the best of intentions go out on town trails with lawn rakes, make the trails nice and neat, and don't understand that a raked trail turns muddy and slick when rain falls. Trail mud sticks to sneakers, trail bike tires and boot treads, is lifted from one area, dropped in another, and creates depressions which then hold rain water longer causing trail conditions to continue to worsen in a never ending cycle. Raked trails also encourage erosion where trail grades change. Leaves, pine needles and twigs belong on our trails; they help keep Duxbury's footpaths healthy and should never be removed.

Other trail walkers ignore commonsense rules and take their dogs along without bringing poop bags. We've all stepped on the results and it is not pleasant. Picking up after dogs and then carrying the bags out and properly disposing of them is common courtesy. It is also the law. Tossing bags in the woods is not proper disposal nor is leaving them in parking areas. There are hefty fines for ignoring the town bylaw addressing dog waste and littering.

Dogs on trails are required to be under the control of their owners. Some dogs are trained well enough to be under control while off leash. But if a dog dashes ahead and alarms other hikers, that dog is not under control. Elderly hikers and children have been knocked to the ground by friendly but enthusiastic dogs off leash. Please be considerate and keep dogs not trained to heel on leash.

Trail head parking areas are pleasant places to park and eat lunch. Unfortunately, some who park for that purpose feel it is perfectly all right to throw wrappers, napkins, bottles and unfinished

food out their car windows before they leave. If you observe this happening, please take down the license plate number and let the Conservation office know.

Signs are posted at some trail heads advising drivers not to park where they will block trail gates. When trail maintenance is necessary, a car blocking a gate means work cannot be accomplished. The second and perhaps more important reason not to block trail gates is that it makes it difficult for police and fire to respond to trail emergencies. Many elderly residents use Duxbury's trails and keeping an EMT from assisting an older hiker with a health issue could mean the difference between life and death.

Please, do not block gates!

Did you know that while Duxbury owns many bogs on conservation lands in town, the federal government owns the agricultural rights to some and has rules for their use and maintenance that conservation must adhere to? The Crowell Bogs conservation area is a good example. Those bogs must remain covered with a certain amount of water to inhibit the growth of species like white pine and red maple. Boards are used in existing bog dams to control water levels. In other places, loose stone dams are built because they can easily be added to or removed to control water levels. Occasionally hikers, for some reason, take it upon themselves to remove boards and rocks. This makes the town non-compliant with Federal rules and it is not helpful. If, while walking conservation properties, you see something you think should be changed, please, check with the Conservation office first.

Or, if you would like to help with occasional work on Duxbury's conservation trails, call Steve Donovan at 781-837-7782 or email him at donovansteve568@gmail.com and you can be added to a growing list of volunteers and be notified when a Conservation project could use helping hands.